BROODER HOUSES, CHICKEN HOUSES, COLONY HOUSES, COOPS

Maxine Kortum Durney 1988

"Capturing the County's Coops (Idea is Hatched)" was a headline in the Press Democrat February 2, 1988. A picture of a woman peering into an old chicken house illustrated the article. The word "coops" caught my eye, and that is why I am writing, to explain that there were chicken houses, brooder houses, colony houses, egg rooms, grain houses .... as well as...coops. Each had its function.

The coops were crates for holding a few chickens at a time.

Adult birds were moved from one location to another in coops. A coop is a big wire and wooden slat crate that can be lifted by two men. It has two compartments, with sliding doors on top.

A second kind of coop was used to catch and hold birds as they exited the chicken house. From inside the house they could be driven in small numbers into this coop. Then, removed, one by one, they could be examined to see if they were still laying, or they could be treated for disease, and then set free in the yard.

In contrast to coops, chicken houses were where the hens lived, several hundred to the house. At night they roosted on sloping wire and slat constructions, built above the floor. Daytime the hens were out in the sun in a yard at the side of the house. During the day they returned to lay eggs in box nests attached to the walls.

On my father's ranch the houses had a yard on each side. One was accessible to the chickens, the other was planted to kale. Leaves were pulled from the kale daily to throw to the chickens, and when this great cabbage plant reached maturity the chickens were let in to clean the last of the leaves from the old plants. This left stalks as big around as my arm, leaning at all angles. The first yard was then sealed off from the birds, and was plowed and planted to new young kale plants.

Another type of housing was the"colony house" but when I was a little girl, in the 1920's, these houses were less used. They held perhaps forty birds, were built on skids, and had no floors. They could be pulled by horses to new locations on the big ranches. They were of two sizes, the smaller one for the birds to roost in at night, the other for laying. The young birds, 7 to 9 months old pullets, were moved to the colony houses as they started to lay eggs. These little houses dotted the hills for years, long after it became economic to keep the hens in large numbers in a big house with enclosed yards.

The flocks that I remember on my father's ranch did not have roosters among them. Roosters were maintained with hens on ranches where eggs were produced for the hatcheries.

In the hatcheries - almost all of them in downtown Petaluma - the eggs were placed in huge incubators, where the individual eggs were turned over with a rocker motion, imitating the attention that a sitting hen will give her eggs. When, twenty one days later, the chicks were hatched, they were "sexed", the baby roosters were destroyed, and the rest were placed in ventilated cardboard and slat boxes for delivery to the ranches.

At the ranch the chicks were received at the brooder house. Smaller than the big chicken houses, the brooder house was close to the farm dwelling. The baby chicks were often the responsibility of the farm wife, and in any case had to be watched closely. They were kept warm , by the hundreds, under a big sheet metal dome that trapped warm air from a stove fueled by kerosene or gas.

When we came to Petaluma, in 1922, I was a year old. My father was employed by Sperry Flour Co, a large supplier of grain to the local firm G. P. McNear, who in turn warehoused the feed and sold it to the local ranchers. Carloads of chicken feed arrived each month in Petaluma, the "chicken capitol" of the world. My father was a public relations man, though that term was hardly known in those days. He was a 1914 graduate of the school of poultry husbandry at UC Davis. He visited the poultrymen to talk about feeds and feeding, the need for ventilation in the chicken houses, diseases, inoculations, etc.

I remember watching him wring a bird's neck, then open its stomach with his pocket knife, then with the same narrow blade slit a section of the gut to reveal its content. I remember him talking about a poultry disease called coccidiosis and about a vaccine.

He said of the ranches with their many chicken houses and thousands of birds that it was one of the few enterprises that he knew of where a family could borrow money to purchase a very few acres, and establish a business; and if all the family worked, and if there were no disasters, a living could be earned and debts could be repaid. (according to my sister-in -law, Lucy Kortum, my father said that it was five acres, and that two kids could be raised and sent to college).

Bart Reardon, the high school Ag and shop teacher of the 30's and 40's added another dimension: with 3000 chickens and 10 cows, in the Petaluma poultry & dairy economy, a family

could raise two kids and send them to college (according to my brother, Bill Kortum).

In 1928 Sperry Flour offered my father a position in Seattle. He decided against it, choosing to continue here in Petaluma, but now as a hatcheryman. It was the eve of the Depression. In the course of the following years he was the owner, or part owner, of four hatcheries, in succession, the last one as part of the chicken ranch he purchased on Ely Road, in 1935. We live in the farmhouse, built in 1915, on that ranch.

I can remember going with my father to deliver baby chicks just hours old from our hatchery on North Main street in Petaluma. We would be received at the brooder house where we unloaded the boxes, each holding 100 chicks. We picked up several baby chicks at a time from the compartments of the box and kneeling, placed them inside a foot high fence, on clean straw at the outskirts of the brooder. The chicks ran toward the warmth, and went to sleep there, standing up. I can remember how it felt to have the baby chicks in my hand, three or four of them at a time, their bodies resting on my fingers and their legs between my fingers. I remember the warm smell of the chicks, and the clean smell of the straw.

The babies would be kept here until they feathered out and were ready for the weather outside.

I remember a delivery in the first heat of summer to Sonoma Valley. We stopped in the shade of a big walnut tree on Lakeville highway to cool the chicks, some of whom were dying . We pulled the tops from the ventilated boxes and waited there for the fresh air to revive and save the surviving chicks.

When Mother moved out to the ranch from town (when the house in town finally had a buyer) it was 1942, the first of the war years. Help was scarce, and it fell to Mother to clean the eggs.

It was done with sandpaper.The air of the egg room was filled with dust of eggshell and chicken droppings that had dried on the egg. Some eggs had to be soaked and washed by hand. Eggs were packed to a box, and were picked up twice a week to be taken to the Poultry Producers, a big plant on the river downtown.

Mother with blue bandana around her hair and wearing a house dress (a cotton print of her own making) listened to the radio, the soap operas, each afternoon as she worked. It was better, she said, than going over her own worries.

When I was in high school and college I sometimes helped on the ranch on weekends. The scariest work was to encounter a "broody" hen as I collected eggs. The hens laid one egg a day,(an average of five a week) and liked to lay where

there was already an egg. A broody hen was a hen who had decided to begin "setting" on the several eggs she found in a nest. Broodies are menacing. Such a hen would menace me as I sought to put my hand under her to remove the eggs she had decided to brood and hatch. With her head lowered,her beak open, warning me with a hissing sound, and making herself seem larger by raising her feathers, she defeated me.

The birds were White Leghorns, a breed chosen for their almost year-round laying capacity. White Leghorn roosters were known for their willingness to attack and fight, and the hens were equally fierce when defending a nest of eggs.

The physically hard work was the cleaning of the houses. Manure collected under the roosts and had to be scraped up with hoe and rake and shovel, then removed by wheelbarrow. This was work for the men, and largely fell to my brother Karl, his friend Chick, whom my father paid one dollar a day (raised to one dollar and fifty cents when Chick enrolled at Junior College), and to my younger brother and our cousin. These two, during their junior high and high school years, lived on the ranch, came to town on the school bus, and came to our house on Western avenue for their lunch, on school days.

Accompanying all those who worked around the chicken houses was one of our little rat catching short haired terriers. Rats were a serious problem to the poultrymen. Rats not only carried disease but they fed on the grain, chewing holes in the sacks. Sacks, no longer tight with grain, would become difficult to carry. Grain, spilling, would be wasted.

Dogs were bred to catch rats. My father's dogs came from the Markuson family in Penngrove. Those dogs devoted their lives, with joy, to the catching of rats. On the trail of a rat they barked sharply, then crawled fearlessly under the chicken houses or ran into the corners of the feed room, still barking, then faced the rat head on, grabbing and shaking it in one incredibly fast movement, breaking its back.

It never occurred to me when I was in junior high and high school, and living in town, that my friends who were going home on the bus were going home to clean and pack eggs. They didn't talk about work which they took for granted. Years later Ruth Zipin told me she was jealous of me, a town girl, who could be a member of Camp Fire Girls, and go to afternoon meetings.

My town friends;, now that I think of it, had last names like Ellis, Carpenter, Wilder, McEvoy and Cornell. My country friends, who came in by bus, were second generation Americans. Their family names were Hansen, Larsen, Scott (the

Danish "Skjodt"), Stonitsch, Focht, Suez, Woropaieff, Fradkin, Zipin, Grushkowitz, Matsuda, Kai and Matsumoto.

Their parents were from Denmark, Germany, France, Poland, Norway, Portugal, Russia, from which they had fled as White Russians, or as Jews from persecution, and Japan.

Petaluma . . . Invincible!

By MAX KORTUM
Petaluma, California

Some time ago we reprinted parts of a booklet issued by the Petaluma Chamber of Commerce 35 years ago. An "old-timer," Mr. Max Kortum, felt that the story called for a follow-up—to bring the area's activities and future outlook up to date. We are happy to present to our readers Mr. Kortum's article, which was received several months before he became Democratic candidate for Congress from the First District, but its use deferred for one reason or another.

* * *

THE HAUNCH of Venison is a pub in Hertfordshire, England. While drinking their ale the barmaid asked, "And where are you Yanks from? — Oh! Petaluma. That's the village where they keep the fowl for eggs, is it not?"

And so, as Detroit stands for automobiles, or Akron for tires, the name Petaluma is known around the globe as the City of Eggs. Following her tradition of the early 'eighties, she remains the "Hen House" for this great expanding metropolis, which someday will reach from San Jose to Santa Rosa. Figures today indicate an increase of nine thousand people every month for Northern California and a great portion of these are in this central area. No longer, as in her earlier days, does Petaluma have to look for outside markets; indeed, her supply is not enough, and demand means expansion. So the sun shines brightly on the future of this little city with its happy social life made so by a people who work hard but do so with a joy of thanksgiving.

Deep, down to the bedrock, solid, impregnable she stands, "The Egg Basket of the World." Her huge mills are man's monuments, her climate and soils, God's gift to a great industry. How well you named her, Bert Kerrigan; your inspiration will go down through the years as a tribute to our Petaluma poultry pioneers. And these pioneers, who were they? For the most part the sons and daughters of Norsemen, men and women who planted deeply and firmly, for theirs was a blood which for many generations had met the challenge of a cold and vigorous north.

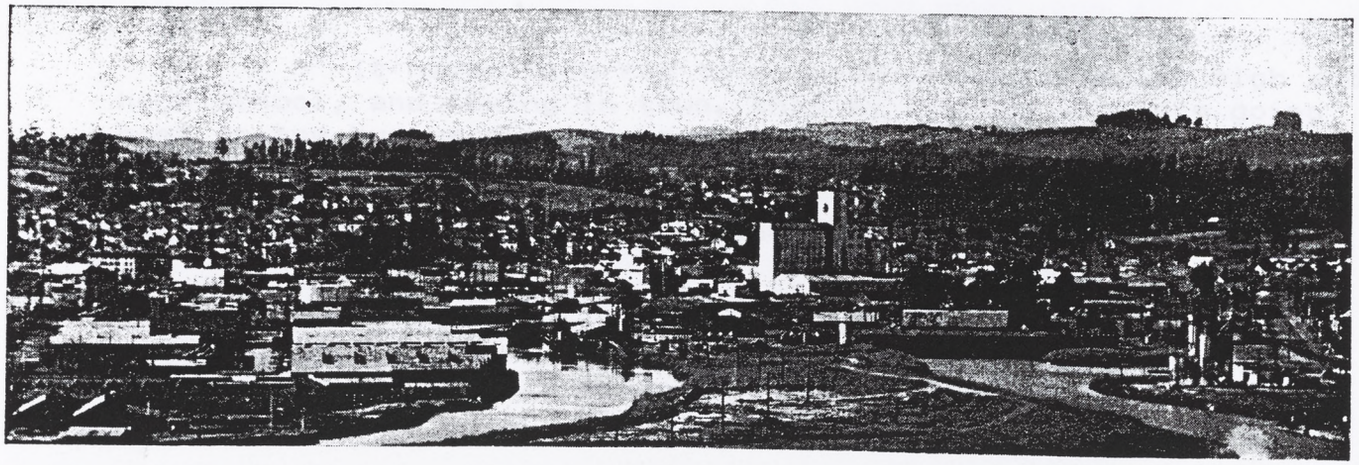
Max Kortum

A foundation now sixty and more years deep was laid down by these people upon the little rolling hills bordering the Petaluma River. Such is the Petaluma of yesterday, built on a wonderful productive industry by a happy and thrifty people. This is the great Heritage, as the sons and daughters of these pioneers march on to still higher horizons. But alongside them today we find the blood of many nations and people: the young Jews, the young American-Japanese, the young Italians, to name a few. They are the vanguard who, as they march forward during the next twenty years, will show the world the greatest and most intensive poultry industry ever witnessed by man—an Egg Basket never to be surpassed.

Aware of Opportunities

What a wonderful group these young people are, ever alert and on the front lines of progress, and what an opportunity lies before them. While their fathers and mothers had to go on their own, solving their problems with folklore and self-applied common sense, backed by dominant will and hard work, this new generation takes over with advanced poultry science and, in most instances, a well-rounded agricultural education.

These sons of pioneers have faith. I have seen them grow from children to manhood; poultry to them is like wheat is to the son of a wheat farmer. Their one great asset is volume; they talk in terms of five and ten thousand hens. In their hands today, with rapid speed, the old poultry houses are taking on "the new look," or modern houses are being built. Brooding systems are changing to produce sturdier stock and, above all, there is an all-out recognition of the values of better breeding. Chicks are being bought for their bred performance and health, and little is said about the



Towering mills and production plants—monuments to pioneer poultrymen—serve an industry that last year added $31,376,199 to Sonoma County's farm income, about half of the county's total farm income.

price, for most of these young people have a knowledge of the better points of breeding. Not only is this new generation changing over, but the old timers are falling into line with this advancement.

Unlike other agricultural sections, Petaluma's poultry farms are not going to be subdivided into homes for the thousands of newcomers to California. These little egg factories are already homes and instead of losing their ground to this human expansion, they will grow and profit from it. They will supply the golden breakfast and health food to the millions who tomorrow will build this bay area into one of the largest empires in the world.

Can't Surpass Industrious Hens

The man on Main Street need not worry about Petaluma's future. I am often surprised when I hear talk about bringing industries to town, for there is no factory that can surpass these little farms with their egg machines working day and night. Some years ago, I remember listening to the late James Rice, head of poultry at Cornell and honored today as the Dean of our poultry husbandry. Speaking at the annual dinner of the Petaluma Chamber of Commerce, men of business: "This is the most perfect product that man can produce; it comes completely packed and finished as it is produced by our little white egg machines. As Omar spoke of the wine, so we can say of Petaluma's eggs:

"I often wonder what the Vintners buy,
That's half as precious as the stuff they sell."

One need but look at the waterfront; see the large towering feed mills, the moving freight trains and numerous trucks and the water transportation, to realize the big job the little hen has done in these years. No other domestic animal can surpass her as a producer of cash values. One five thousand hen enterprise has a monetary turnover in value of feed, eggs, replacement, hired labor, family expense, upkeep, taxes, etc., of close to seventy thousand dollars a year. And with this egg production Petaluma has one of the largest poultry meat-growing industries in the state, where each unit also represents an enormous annual turnover of money. There is coming a day soon when this poultry meat will be packed and properly marketed right out of Petaluma; the grower is crying for help in this today. Such a processing plant would be of far greater value to Petaluma than any other manufacturing plant, for every added return that these growers can get means a greater Petaluma. The eviscerated packaged chicken is rapidly becoming the home package for the housewife. Carloads of such packed poultry under a Petaluma trademark will some day be flowing out of packing plants daily. This is coming—it is a must.

Once a year Petaluma gets together and eats "Ham and Eggs" for breakfast, as a street festival.

Nationally Recognized Leaders

Much has passed since the day back in the 'eighties when, as the old gentleman Byce, "the father of the incubator," told the writer: "The first flock of one thousand hens (brown leghorns) was out near Two Rock and people would drive out there of a Sunday just to see that many birds together." During these sixty to seventy years, these flocks have grown into millions. Petaluma has made history, it has produced men who have received national recognition for their leadership in the industry. Not only did the pioneer poultrymen make Petaluma, but also the inventor of poultry equipment and the manufacturer of feeds. Petaluma could well put up a plaque with many poultry honors. These all contributed through the years to the solidity of this great foundation.

This great Egg Basket with all its allied industries is a citadel of poultry strength, invincible, for today again as history repeats, it stands in the pathway of a great Bay Area development. This also was true in its early history. In the meanwhile these sons and daughters of the pioneers will do the job. They will do a big job, big in keeping with tradition and the towering mills and production plants, monuments to their forebears. With vision and greater precision, they march forward, while we older ones stand by and dream, seeing in the distance the greatest Egg Basket ever known to man—an eternal reward to the spirit of the Lyman Byces and the John Bergstedts and all the others who have fought and won in their unselfish battle for the rights and welfare of their fellow poultrymen. Truly, a great inheritance.

Kimber Fellowship Awarded

LEON S. ROSENBLATT, graduate student in the University of California department of poultry husbandry, has been awarded the first Kimber Fellowship in Poultry Genetics.

Under the fellowship made available for the first time this year by Kimber Farms of Niles, Rosenblatt will receive $3,000 for a study in population genetics during the 1954-55 academic year. He will work under the direction of I. Michael Lerner, U. C. professor of poultry husbandry and geneticist in the Experiment Station.

Rosenblatt received his B.S. degree in poultry husbandry from Rutgers University College of Agriculture in 1953, and has been a poultry husbandry graduate student on the U. C. Berkeley campus over the past year.

PETALUMA HISTORICAL LIBRARY AND MUSEUM
Oral History Program
Family History Questionnaire

	Name	Birthdate	Birthplace	Deceased? Date
Parents*	MAX ADOLPH KORTUM	12-15-1870	CALISTOGA	1965
	ELEANOR LOVINA CROUCH	12-5-1891	CALISTOGA	1956
Brothers & Sisters	KARL CROUCH KORTUM	8-17-17	SAN BERNARDINO	1996
	WILLIAM MAX KORTUM	7-22-27	PETALUMA	
Grand-parents*	WILHELM KARL LUDWIG (LOUIS) KORTUM	1846	SCHWERIN, MECKLENBERG, GERMANY	1925
	ANNA EVERS KORTUM	1858	CINCINNATI	1937
	FRANK SHERMAN CROUCH	1865	CANANDAIGUA N.Y.	1927
	ALICE (BARTON) SPIRES CROUCH	1865	SONOMA COUNTY BRIGGS CREEK	1943
Spouse	WILLIAM RALPH DURNEY	4-21-1917	SAN FRANCISCO	8-30-91
Children	ULNA DURNEY BREYFOGLE	10-2-45	SANTA ROSA	
	JOSIAH WHITE DURNEY	12-4-46	CHICO	
	MAX WILLIAM DURNEY	3-13-49	REDBLUFF	
Grandchildren	HELEN BREYFOGLE	73	SANTA ROSA	
	LEWELLYN TUTT DURNEY	93	WEST CHESTER	PENNSYLVANIA
	PETER WILLIAM BREYFOGLE	77	SANTA ROSA SAN FRANCISCO	
	MAX ALFRED BREYFOGLEE	79	SANFRANCISCO	
	ELIZABETH NAN DURNEY	81	SANTA ROSA	
	FLORENCE WOODS DURNEY	87	SANTA ROSA	
	SARAH ELISABETH DURNEY	91	SAN FRANCISCO	
	RACHEL ALEXANDRIA DURNEY	'00	SAN FRANCISCO	

*Please include maiden name of mother and grandmothers.

THANK YOU!

PETALUMA HISTORICAL MUSEUM
Oral History Program

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PLACE 198 Elz Rd
Petaluma Ca 94954

DATE Oct 18 93

Maxine Korlan Harney
(Interviewee)

(for the Petaluma Historical Museum)

5-1-98

PETALUMA HISTORICAL LIBRARY AND MUSEUM
Oral History Program
Narrator Personal Information Questionnaire

Name DURNEY MAXINE ELEANOR KORTUM
Last First Middle (Maiden)

Address 198 ELY RD PETALUMA CA 94954

Marital status: Married___ Sihgle___ Divorced___ Widowed X

Birthdate 3-1-21 Birthplace SANTA CRUZ

Length of residence in Petaluma (or Sonoma County) 1921-1946 1979-1998

Education: Elementary school WASHINGTON GRAMMAR PETALUMA

Secondary school PETALUMA JR and SR HIGH Grad 1938
SANTA ROSA JUNIOR COLLEGE 1940
College UC BERKELEY Grad 1942

Other SCHOOL OF LIBRARIANSHIP, U.C. BERKELEY 1943

Occupation(s) or former occupations(s) PUBLIC LIBRARIAN,
PETALUMA PUBLIC LIBRARY, TEHAMA COUNTY
LIBRARY, SONOMA COUNTY LIBRARY, ALAMEDA COUNTY LIBRARY

Travels KENYA, TOKYO AND JAPAN, LONDON, NEW YORK
MADRID, SOUTHERN FRANCE, MEXICO

Organizations, clubs CALIFORNIA NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY,
MILO BAKER CHAPTER FRIENDS PETALUMA REGIONAL LIBRARY

Other special interests DIRECTOR, 10 YEARS, SOUTHERN
SONOMA COUNTY RESOURCE CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Additional comments CO-AUTHOR AND ~~TAPER~~ INTERVIEWER PETALUMA
POULTRY PIONEERS, EDITED BY THEA S. LOWRY,
COMPILER

THANK YOU!